

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Carrying On A Conservation Legacy

Atlantic's Kris Wernimont continues husband's conservation legacy through CSP contract

*by Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist
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Pancreatic cancer ended Iowa farmer Al Wernimont's life in November 2011, but not before his 30 years of conservation achievements were rewarded by a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract. His wife, Kris, chose to continue their CSP contract and Al's conservation legacy after working closely with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff in Atlantic, Iowa.

"I was mostly a sounding-board for Al, so making the final decision on farming operation issues was difficult," she said. Putting her name on the CSP contract and following through with the five-year commitment was one of her easiest decisions, though. "I wasn't sure how I would do it, but with the help of NRCS I am doing it," she said. "The NRCS folks were patient, and helped explain the program and what I needed to do to follow through."

Kris says fulfilling the CSP contract, which covers 231 acres of pasture and cropland, is the right thing to do. "Al earned the CSP contract through years of good land stewardship," she said. "He told me before he died I didn't have to keep the contract if it was too much work, but it hasn't been."

More than 50 million acres have been enrolled into CSP in the program's first five years. Kris is one of more than 39,000 CSP contract holders nationwide. This voluntary program that NRCS administers is offered to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who are already using conservation measures.

Through CSP, producers are credited with past conservation activities, but they are also challenged to



Following her husband's death in November 2011, Kris Wernimont worked closely with NRCS to continue their CSP contract.

implement new measures – called enhancements – that ramp their natural resource protection to the next level. Kris says CSP allowed them to think about areas of the farm they never considered addressing. A few enhancements on the Wernimont farm include:

- » drift-reducing nozzles for pesticide applications;
- » retrofitted watering tanks for livestock that allow wildlife to escape if they become trapped while drinking water; and
- » solar panels for more energy efficient electric fencing for livestock containment.

Kris feels one particular enhancement – split nitrogen application – is not only environmentally friendly, but it also helps increase profits. This practice involves applying 50 percent of total crop nitrogen needs within 30 days prior to planting and the remaining 50 percent

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One of Wernimont's CSP enhancements included solar-powered fencing for livestock containment

after crop emergence. "We are making better use of our nutrients," she said. "The plant can now utilize nitrogen as needed, when it needs it, and in a timely manner."

Dave York, who serves as Wernimont's NRCS district conservationist in Cass County, says CSP enhancements are helping to keep the local East Nishnabotna River cleaner. "Many of our CSP recipients use practices like no-till and terraces which keep sediment from running off into the East Nishnabotna and its tributaries," he said. "Now, many of the CSP enhancements they have implemented that focus on nutrient management are helping to keep nitrates in the soil for plant use and out of water bodies."

Kris hired Sean South, a family friend and neighbor, to help farm her cropland. South says his land and farming style are very similar to Al's. "From planting the same row widths for corn to many of the conservation practices such as filter strips and terraces, we bounced ideas off each other and implemented many of the same ideas," he said. "I was already using the solar powered electric fence and drift-reducing nozzles for pesticide applications."



A split nitrogen application is a CSP enhancement that is helping Wernimont apply nutrients in a more environmentally-friendly way, and she is getting better use of the nitrogen, which produces a better crop.

York says CSP recipients in his area treat it like a badge of honor. "Farmers want to be rewarded for what they're doing, and CSP does that," he said.

To help producers determine if CSP is suitable for their operation, a self-screening checklist is available which highlights basic eligibility requirements, contract obligations and potential payments.